

SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE STORIES FROM
FAMOUS CHIEFS

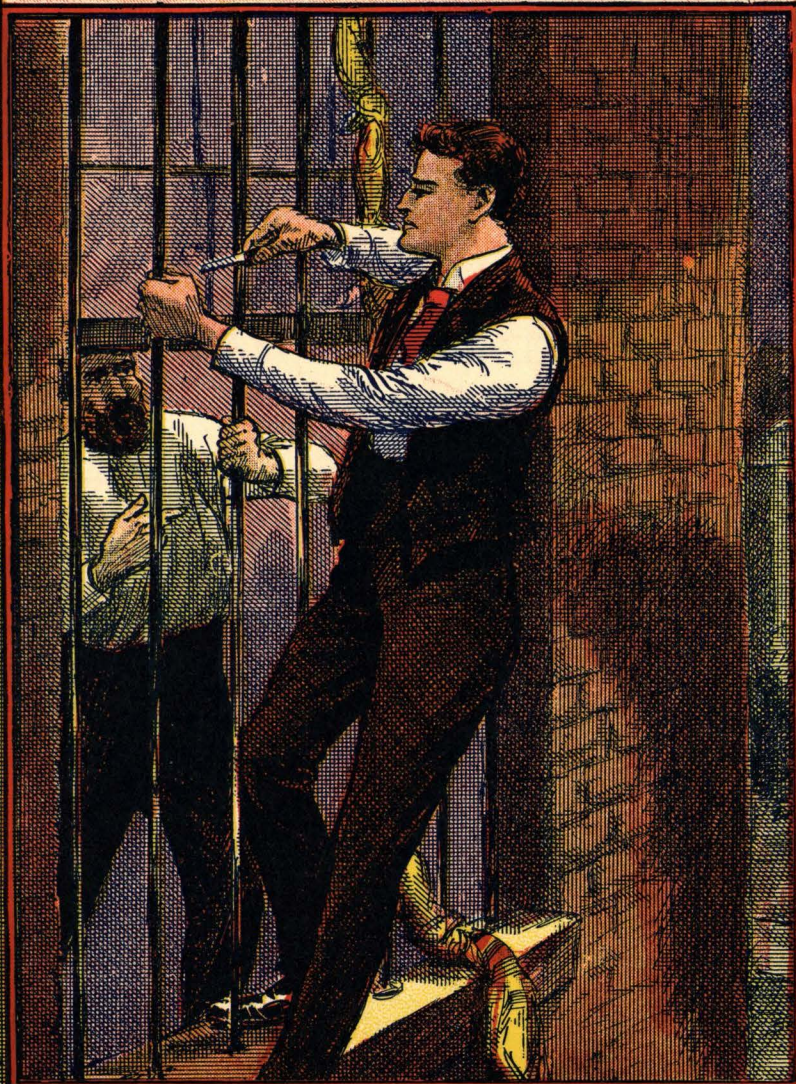


THE NOTE-BOOKS OF
OF POLICE

BEHIND THE ASYLUM BARS

or Turned down as a Hopeless Case

BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



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SHIELD WEEKLY

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BEHIND THE ASYLUM BARS; OR,

TURNED DOWN AS A HOPELESS CASE.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

A MATTER OF A MILLION.

"Why did Dr. Rigby write this letter in cipher?"

"You recognize the cryptic characters, do you not?"

"I recognize them, yes! They are the characters of a secret code known only to the London surgeon and myself. But that does not answer my question. Why did Dr. Rigby adopt this secret code, in writing what ostensibly is merely a letter of introduction brought by you to me?"

"Possibly the letter in that form was calculated to convey more than appears on the surface."

"Am I to infer so?"

"Shall I tell you what Dr. Rigby said to me when he placed the letter in my hand?"

"If that will enlighten me, yes."

"He said," replied the other, "if Dr. Kennedy receives the letter written in our confidential code, instead of the ordinary script, it will at once assure him that you, Mr. Maxwell, are not only a client of mine, but a man whom he also may thoroughly trust, whatever your mission or design.' Those, Dr. Kennedy, were Dr. Rigby's precise words, uttered when he handed me that letter of introduction."

Dr. Felix Kennedy eyed his visitor more sharply.

The light in the doctor's private office, for the time was evening, was shed full upon the caller. Though he looked older, he was a man still under thirty. His figure was large and muscular, but without corpulence. His complexion was light, his features regular,

and he wore a brown beard, parted in the middle.

He would have been an attractive man had it not been for a coldness of expression and the subtle intensity habitual to his searching gray eyes. His look appeared to be that of a man who might be crafty and cruel, even, should occasion require.

Dr. Felix Kennedy was an opposite type of man. He was short, dark and compact, as powerful as a bull, and his smoothly-shaven face indicated a superior intellect and a will as inflexible as iron. His hair was cut close to his large, round head, and was quite gray; yet Dr. Kennedy was under fifty. He looked like a man whom it would not be wise to oppose; his square jaw was like that of a bulldog.

The two men sat confronting each other at the same side of a center-table. The office was well furnished, and a fire glowed in the grate. The office door was closed and latched.

The world outside was in darkness. Only a few stars were discernible between the clouds coursing across the autumn heavens. A strong October wind was whirling the dying leaves from the branches of the neighboring trees, and whistling and moaning most dismally about the eaves and corners of Kennedy's great private sanitarium and asylum for the insane, the lofty stone walls of which, with its three dark wings and its hideous barred windows, were more dark and dismal than the night itself.

Here and there the face of some unfortunate within was pressed against the window pane of his lonely room, to peer out through the bars confining him, and stare with vacant eyes at the gloom of the sky, or to make grotesque imagery of the gloomier trees, with their swaying and sighing.

More remote were the suburban fields and meadows, with the lanterns of the long

driveway to the asylum alone relieving the night darkness; while several miles distant, less elevated even than the inland hills on which Kennedy's institution stood grim and isolated, were the lights of Boston, with its illumined dome of gold upon the State House rising over all.

Dr. Kennedy's office was in the left wing of the extensive stone building. There was no danger of an intrusion. It would have been all an employee's life was worth to have opened the closed door of that office without first ringing a bell from a corridor twenty feet away. For Dr. Kennedy ruled with an iron rod every department of his institution, and no powder magazine was ever governed by a more rigid and exacting master.

His searching scrutiny of Maxwell's cold gray eyes culminated with the question:

"Has Dr. Rigby, of London, long been a personal friend of yours?"

"For many years," replied Maxwell, with a curious mingling of firmness and complacency.

Had there been a third party present, a witness to this interview, it would have been very evident to him that these two men were sounding one another with the extreme caution of total strangers; and that some evil design, if not a crime of the most desperate character, was mutually understood to be the object of this meeting.

"Then Dr. Rigby knows you very well, Mr. Maxwell," rejoined the autocrat of the asylum.

"He certainly does, sir."

"And how do you regard him?"

"As a man whom one may safely trust with a hazardous secret."

"Did he recommend you for a like quality?"

"Had he not done so, Dr. Kennedy, I should have had no occasion to call upon you."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Maxwell, this letter so informs me," Dr. Kennedy now replied. "Dr. Rigby and myself were very intimately associated when I lived in England years ago. I presume I invite no danger in now admitting to you, that Dr. Rigby and I were at that time mutually interested in occasional transactions which would have been very censoriously regarded had the truth ever become public, and which might have cost both of us our liberty, if not life."

It was said with a smile, the very sinister character of which was sufficient to disclose the decidedly vicious nature of the speaker.

Tracy Maxwell bowed, and the expression of evil satisfaction which rose over his composed features showed that he thoroughly appreciated all that the physician's words had implied.

"So I have understood, Dr. Kennedy," he rejoined. "It was for that very reason that I knew I could wisely approach you at this time."

"When did you arrive in America, Mr. Maxwell?"

"Rather more than a month ago."

"And in Boston?"

"Less than a week ago."

"Upon business?"

"Very important business, sir!" said Maxwell, deeply.

"And upon what matter do you wish to consult me, sir?"

"Father than to consult you, I have called to make a proposition which Dr. Rigby gave me to understand that you would seriously consider."

"I shall be pleased at least to hear it," said Dr. Kennedy, smiling again. "I'll add that you may feel free to speak very plainly."

"Thank you," said Maxwell, dryly. "I presume there is no danger of an eaves-dropper?"

Dr. Kennedy's smile became a low, hard

laugh; a laugh which would have grated with frightful repulsiveness on the nerves of any honest and sensitive man.

"No, no danger of that, Mr. Maxwell," he returned, significantly. "I am the head and front of this institution, sir, and my employees know me too well to take any liberty to which I would offer an objection."

"Probably you're already aware that they are men and women who may be trusted?" observed Maxwell, half inquiringly.

Dr. Kennedy's sinister eyes took on an expression from which some men would have recoiled.

"My employees obey my commands without question, never doubt that!" he replied, with grim austerity. "They are well paid, sir, and I invariably know my man before I employ him. Mr. Maxwell, if you were never to leave this institution; if, indeed, these walls were now to become the tomb in which, living or dead, you were eternally to repose, I would defy the outside world to discover where you were, or what had become of you."

"I am glad to hear that!" said Maxwell, oddly, with a smile.

"Now, sir, you surely can feel that you may speak plainly."

Maxwell drew his chair a little closer to that of the physician.

"I do feel so," he replied. "In fact, I have felt so from the first, Dr. Kennedy, yet the delicate nature of my proposition has led me to broach it with discretion."

"Cast discretion to the winds, sir!" exclaimed Dr. Kennedy, curtly. "Dr. Rigby, if you know him for what he is, is surely a sufficient voucher between us. Speak out, sir!"

Tracy Maxwell demurred no longer.

"Dr. Kennedy," he replied, with sinister earnestness; "I am the younger son of the late Richard Maxwell, of Staffordshire, Eng-

land. My father died three months ago, leaving to his heirs an estate worth 200,000 pounds sterling, from which accrues an annual income of ten thousand pounds."

"A matter of a million in American money," observed Dr. Kennedy, smiling. "That is a very handsome principal, sir."

"Too handsome a property to lose, if it can be by any means secured."

"I should think so! What are the particulars, Mr. Maxwell?"

"These," said Maxwell, earnestly. "My father was twice married, and died a widower. He had only two children, both boys, and one by each wife. I am the issue of the second marriage, and hence the younger son."

"And your brother?"

"My half-brother, sir?"

"I stand corrected; your half-brother?"

"His name is Horace Maxwell. He is nearly ten years my senior, and is now about thirty-six years of age. Until a few days ago I had not seen him since he was twenty; and he did not recognize in me the boy of ten, whom he saw nearly eighteen years ago for the last time."

"Am I to understand that Horace Maxwell is in this country?"

"He is in Boston, sir."

"Go on, Mr. Maxwell," said the physician, with an expressive smile. "You interest me!"

"Before he was twenty," continued Tracy Maxwell, "my half-brother committed a misdemeanor in Oxford, where he was receiving his education, and seriously incurred my father's displeasure."

"Go on, Mr. Maxwell."

"The censure of my father was so severe, sir, that Horace, who was a high-strung and impulsive youth, took bitter exceptions to it. His resentment was so great, and the breach between him and his father so serious, that Horace Maxwell suddenly left England for

parts unknown, and was not heard from afterward."

"Oh, I see!"

"My father relented during his last illness," continued Maxwell, frowning slightly; "and, instead of bequeathing to me his entire estate, he made a will in my half-brother's favor, with the provision that Horace Maxwell must be located within two years, and found to be a man whose character and vocation should, in the judgment of my father's solicitor, render him worthy of becoming his heir. In that case, Dr. Kennedy, my half-brother will receive the bulk of the estate, and I shall be cut off with a paltry twenty thousand pounds."

"Shocking!" said Dr. Kennedy, raising his hands in a deprecatory gesture. "That would be an injustice not calmly to be suffered by any man with a spirit of his own. What have you done about this since your father's death?"

Maxwell shrugged his broad shoulders and smiled faintly.

"I've since been making strenuous efforts to head off what you so aptly termed an injustice," he replied. "By ostensibly sanctioning the will of my father, I've blinded our solicitor to my true sentiments. At his suggestion I came to America to locate my half-brother, if possible, and inform him of the situation."

"And you have discovered Horace Maxwell?"

"Precisely."

"Does he know that your father has died?"

"He does not."

"And he has not recognized you?"

"I am absolutely certain that he has not."

"Then, if Horace Maxwell was to be—well," and Dr. Kennedy put it quite delicately for him; "if Horace Maxwell was to be effectually removed from the world, or, at least, to that extent which would prevent him

from communicating with the world, you would at the end of two years inherit the entire estate of your deceased parent? Am I right?"

"Perfectly so!" said Maxwell, significantly.

"I now can imagine of what your proposition will consist!" said Dr. Kennedy, cheerfully rubbing his hands.

"It would not seem to require a very vivid imagination," rejoined Maxwell, with a dry laugh.

"No, not at all."

"And what answer may I feel that I am likely to receive from you, sir?"

Dr. Kennedy wheeled his chair about, and, resting his palms on his knees, looked his visitor steadfastly in the face.

"Suppose, Mr. Maxwell, that I were to co-operate with you in the removal of your half-brother," he slowly demanded; "what would there be in it for me?"

"A sum equal to my inheritance if he is removed," was the immediate reply.

"Twenty thousand pounds?"

"Twenty thousand pounds, sir!"

Dr. Kennedy smiled agreeably.

"That is a sufficient incentive, providing its payment can be insured," he said, pointedly.

"I will provide for that, sir."

"A few questions, then, if you please."

"Ask them."

"Where is Horace Maxwell now located?"

"In Boston, under the name of John Wildman."

"The artist?"

"None other," replied Maxwell, gravely. "It was through one of his paintings which I chanced to see in New York, and which depicted a bit of rural scenery near the home of our boyhood, that I unexpectedly located him."

"That was curious, and would seem to indicate that things are working in your favor,

Mr. Maxwell," observed the physician. "You have no doubt of his identity?"

"Absolutely none! I recognized him instantly."

"Do you think you can by any means lure him to this asylum without making him suspicious of something wrong?"

"Easily, Dr. Kennedy."

"And without his having imparted to any person the fact that he was to come here?"

"He himself will not know it until he arrives here. I easily can accomplish that."

"You have been cultivating his acquaintance, then?"

"I have called on him in a business way only, or so at least he imagined," Maxwell gravely replied. "I shall give him to understand that I wish to engage him to paint a scene in this locality, and I can easily get him to come out here with me, ostensibly for the purpose of viewing it."

"That's not bad!" nodded Dr. Kennedy, approvingly. "You certainly have a good head for designing. By what name does he know you?"

"By the name of McKenzie."

"He is not married, is he?"

"He is a bachelor, and his studio is in his suite of chambers."

"No wife or family to stir up a mess! No kindred in this country! It would seem that the authorities would speedily let the mystery drop, should this man abruptly disappear," said Dr. Kennedy, glibly weighing the situation. "What more have you to say to me, Mr. Maxwell?"

"Merely this, Dr. Kennedy," returned Maxwell, with a more crafty and cruel look than he had yet worn. "His confinement alone will not serve my purpose. I could not rest in ease, knowing that he some day might effect his escape, and, perhaps, confront me with my crime. With him absolutely removed from my path, I may enjoy

wealth, social position and political distinction; only such incentives as these could lead me even to consider such an appalling outrage."

"Faugh!"

"I mean what I say," cried Maxwell, with forcible austerity. "If Horace Maxwell enters this place with me, confinement alone will not suffice! I shall require more of you than that!"

"There is but one thing more," said Dr. Kennedy; "and that is—death!"

"And that is what I shall require!" declared Maxwell, with his cheeks grown quite pale.

But Dr. Felix Kennedy's inflexible countenance continued as composed and hard as a face of stone.

"Don't regard it so seriously!" he said, with dry bluntness. "Birth and death are merely incidents. Sometimes it is necessary to prevent the one; sometimes it is equally wise to effect the other. Sit nearer the fire, and smoke a Henry Clay. Or, perhaps, you would prefer a stimulant instead. There is some brandy in the wall cabinet. Help yourself, Mr. Maxwell. I am quite certain now that we shall have no difficulty in arranging the details of this trifling little episode!"

Maxwell stared down at the cold, hard face of the speaker, and demanded, huskily:

"Will you consent to do it, then?"

"For the price mentioned!" said Dr. Kennedy, pointedly.

"And my half-brother?"

"Do your part as I shall direct," grimly returned the physician; "and within a month, sir, you will have no half-brother!"

CHAPTER II.

SHERIDAN KEENE'S YOUNG CALLER.

"There's a lady in the parlor, Mr. Keene, who appears very anxious indeed that you will see her."

Sheridan Keene regarded his landlady with some surprise, when she appeared at his chamber door and made the above announcement. The clever detective was not accustomed to receiving lady visitors at his boarding-house, and, although he immediately surmised the probable nature of her mission, he considered the circumstance quite peculiar.

It occurred one evening about eight o'clock, and ten days subsequent to the infamous interview between Dr. Kennedy and Tracy Maxwell, the gentleman from England.

"Did the lady give you her name?" inquired Sheridan Keene, laying aside an enormous scrap-book in which he had been pasting the data and details of the great Mycroft murder mystery, which he had recently solved, to the wonderment and admiration of a dazed and mystified public. "Or do you know the lady by sight?" he added.

"I did not see her face, for she was veiled," was the reply; "and she gave me no card. She said, however, that I might mention the name of Lawyer Bromley."

"Frank Bromley!" exclaimed Keene, immediately rising. "Possibly she is a friend of his. Tell her I will presently join her in the parlor, if you please."

"Certainly, sir."

Keene waited only to replace his book in its shelf, and to change his smoking-jacket for a more conventional garment; and a few minutes later he entered the parlor on the floor below, closing the door behind him.

His visitor, who was seated in a chair near the piano, immediately arose and threw back her veil.

Keene caught his breath for an instant, so great was his surprise.

For the face that met his gaze was like a vision of loveliness. It was that of a young lady, of not more than twenty years, with features as fair as a roseleaf, and an ex-

pression of indescribable beauty and pathetic earnestness. Her eyes were of the softest blue, and the fleece of hair under her dark veil was like a halo to her lovely countenance.

She was neatly dressed in black, with a dark, fashionably-made jacket, and the dignity and grace with which she rose to meet him at once showed her to be a person of culture and refinement.

"Are you Mr. Sheridan Keene, the detective, sir?" she inquired, in a soft, musical voice.

"Yes, madam," bowed Keene, smiling courteously. "Please resume your seat."

"My name is Mary Randall, sir—Miss Randall," she replied, acknowledging his greeting. "I was advised to consult you by Lawyer Bromley, who is a personal friend."

"I inferred the latter, Miss Randall, when my landlady stated that you had mentioned Mr. Bromley's name," replied Keene, taking a seat near her. "About what do you wish to consult me?"

"I require the services of a detective, sir," said Miss Randall, half timidly.

"I do not often undertake any work aside from my duties as a member of the regular force," replied Keene, with grave kindness. "Very possibly I can give you some advice, however, if you care to state the nature of your case? And I, perhaps, can recommend some capable detective to whom you can apply."

But Mary Randall shook her head, and Keene saw the rays of light from overhead reflected from a glistening moisture quickly risen in the girl's blue eyes.

"That will not answer, sir," she replied, with tremulous earnestness. "Mr. Bromley told me to see you, and to state my trouble, and that you certainly would help me. He told me to say that to you from him, sir; and that I must have your assistance at any cost."

"Evidently Mr. Bromley has an exalted

idea of my ability as a detective," said Keene, smiling oddly. "I, at least, will hear your story, Miss Randall. What is the nature of your trouble?"

"The gentleman to whom I am engaged to be married is mysteriously missing."

Under ordinary circumstances the detective would have felt inclined to laugh, for such an occurrence was only too frequent. But recalling the lawyer's interest in the case, and observing the rare beauty and gentleness of the girl opposite, which surely were sufficient to have retained the affection of almost any man, Keene decided that the disappearance might be more than a mere lover's episode.

"Who is the gentleman, Miss Randall?" he asked, gravely.

"His name is John Wildman."

"What is his vocation?"

"He is an artist, and has rooms and a studio near Copley Square."

"How long has he been missing?"

"For five days, sir."

"With whom does he live?"

"He lives alone, sir, occupying a suite of apartments, one room of which he uses for a studio."

Keene regarded her rather doubtfully for a moment.

"Are you quite sure, Miss Randall, that you have reasonable grounds for your evident anxiety?" he asked, gravely.

"Indeed, sir, I have!" exclaimed Miss Randall, with tears in her eyes. "I have known Mr. Wildman for three years, sir, and he is a man of regular habits and scrupulous character."

"Still he may have been abruptly called away on business for a brief time," suggested the detective.

"Impossible, sir!" He certainly would have informed me before leaving, or subsequently have sent me word. We both are strangers

to you, Mr. Keene, hence you can have no appreciation of our relations. Mr. Wildman and I have been engaged for more than a year. We were to have been quietly married day before yesterday. Like him, I am alone in the world, and have had to work for my living. Knowing Mr. Wildman as I do, I am convinced that only an accident or some kind of foul play can have occasioned his mysterious disappearance at a time we both have anticipated so longingly."

"Possibly something has befallen him."

"Oh, Mr. Keene, I beg of you to be influenced by my belief, rather than by the judgment born of your experience; and I implore you not to turn me away without investigating this affair, to me so terrible."

Tears were rolling down the girl's fair cheeks, and her tremulous voice and suppressed sobs appealed to Keene with an irresistible eloquence.

"Calm yourself, Miss Randall," he said, kindly. "When did you last see Mr. Wildman?"

"Last Friday noon, sir. I am employed in the public library, which is but a short walk from Mr. Wildman's studio, and I called there during my noon hour, as I frequently have done."

"And to-day is Wednesday," observed Keene, thoughtfully. "Did you then have any understanding with Mr. Wildman as to when you would next see him?"

"Indeed, yes! He was to call on me that evening."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"No, sir; nor heard from him," was the tearful rejoinder. "I felt a little anxious next morning, lest he might have been ill, and I went to his rooms. For nearly a year, sir, I have had a key to his apartments, that I might enter to await his return at times when I found him away."

"Did you enter his rooms Saturday morning?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"What did you find?"

"I found things precisely as I had observed them the previous noon. His brushes and palette lay where he had left them. His sleeping-room had not been occupied during the night, and his smoking-jacket lay upon the bed. The fire in the grate had expired, and the rooms were cold."

"Did you search for any missive which he might have left for you?"

"High and low, sir; but there was none."

"Did you observe anything which might have suggested at what hour he left his rooms?"

"No, sir," and Mary Randall tearfully shook her head. "A dim light had been left burning in his library——"

"Ah," interposed Keene, quickly; "that indicates that he expected to return after dark, or that it possibly was evening when he left."

"I never thought of that, sir."

"It is a part of our business, that of making deductions from trifling things," replied Keene, kindly. "I will ask you a few more questions, if you please."

Mary Randall's face brightened quickly. She evidently had been told that, if Sheridan Keene would undertake to solve the mystery of John Wildman's disappearance, the truth would very soon be unveiled; and the interest now displayed by the detective seemed to encourage her.

And Keene's wonderful detective art led him instinctively to a series of questions and natural deductions which could have emanated only from an expert in his chosen profession.

"You say you have been acquainted with Mr. Wildman for three years, Miss Randall?"

"Yes, sir; rather more than that."

"Is he a man of means?"

"He has only what he has derived from his profession, sir. He is not wealthy."

"I think I have heard him mentioned as a successful artist, have I not?"

"Very likely, sir. He, for the past three years, has had a ready market for his paintings."

"Is he what is commonly termed a society man?"

"Not at all, sir. He has very few intimate friends, and is naturally very reserved."

"Reserved people are frequently taciturn and moody," said Keene, suggestively. "How about Mr. Wildman?"

"Quite the contrary, sir," said Miss Randall, with a shake of her head. "He is invariably genial and cheerful, yet he has never cared for a large circle of friends."

"Have you ever heard him speak of having any enemies?"

"Never, sir."

"Who were his antecedents?"

"I cannot tell you, Mr. Keene," Miss Randall said, sadly.

"Do you mean that he was to be married to you, Miss Randall, without having told you of his family?"

"I think he perhaps would have done so before he married me," she replied. "He said only a week ago that he had a little secret to confide to me, relating to his early life. But the disclosure of it was then deferred, and I now cannot say what it would have been."

"Did he use the word secret?" inquired Keene, more gravely.

"That was the very word he used, sir."

"You do not know, then, where he was born, or where he lived in early life?"

"No, sir; I do not," replied Miss Randall, regretfully.

Then she abruptly added, though with some uncertainty:

"But I at times have thought I noticed in his speech certain features which led me to think that he was an Englishman, or that he had lived in England."

"Did you make any remark to him to that effect?"

"Once, sir."

"How did he receive it?"

"He colored slightly, I thought; yet he merely laughed at my observation, and made no reply."

"As a matter of fact, Miss Randall, you know very little about Mr. Wildman, save as a friend?" said Keene, gently.

"That is true, sir," she replied, with a sob. "But I know, as only one can know whose heart has abiding faith in the love he had bestowed upon her, that some terrible misfortune has befallen John Wildman. Any who know him, sir, will tell you he is not a man who voluntarily would have acted thus."

There was in the case something which now began to appeal to Sheridan Keene. He turned his chair a little nearer that of his fair visitor, and said, kindly:

"Do not distress yourself too deeply, Miss Randall. I think I'll investigate the case for you."

"Oh, sir, how am I to thank you?"

"Thank me after I have accomplished something," replied Keene, smiling. "Now carefully answer my questions. You say you last saw Mr. Wildman on Friday noon? Do you know upon what work he was engaged at that time?"

"I think upon one of his paintings, sir."

"Did he mention having any appointment for that evening?"

"He did not."

"Do you know if he lately has had business relations with any stranger?"

"Yes, sir, he has," the girl said, quickly. "He told me he expected to paint a picture for a new customer."

"Did he mention the person's name?"

"Oh, yes; the name was McKenzie."

"You do not know the full name?"

"I do not," said Miss Randall, shaking her

head. "But since Mr. Wildman mysteriously disappeared, Mr. McKenzie has called once at the library to see me, to ask if I could inform him when Mr. Wildman would return."

Keene's grave face changed slightly, and his eyes lighted perceptibly.

"How did Mr. McKenzie know of your relations with Mr. Wildman?" he inquired, gravely.

"I do not know, sir."

"Had he ever seen you in the studio of the artist?"

"Possibly, sir; or, perhaps, Mr. Wildman told him about me."

"It is not probable, Miss Randall, that a man of natural reserve would have told a stranger anything about you, or about his relations with you," said Keene, quickly. "Do you know where this McKenzie may be found?"

"No, sir; I do not."

"Will you describe the man, please?"

Mary Randall at once complied, giving Keene quite a precise description of the general appearance of Mr. Tracy Maxwell; and the detective, when she had concluded, closed the book in which he had casually noted a few of her disclosures.

"Do you still retain the key of Mr. Wildman's rooms?" he then asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Can you conveniently meet me there at ten o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"Indeed, sir, yes!" exclaimed Miss Randall, eagerly.

"Do so, then," said Keene, with grave decisiveness. "I will be there at precisely ten."

CHAPTER III.

IN THE NEGLECTED STUDIO.

Man is an animal of habits. That John Wildman had done something entirely out of his ordinary course; that a stranger had recently appeared with interest in him, a

man whose conduct in seeking information of Wildman's betrothed, was at least unusual, and that the latter's past was a mystery even to the girl he was about to wed—upon these facts Sheridan Keene chiefly based an opinion that the strange disappearance of Wildman was a mystery worth investigating.

Half an hour before the time appointed for meeting Mary Randall next morning Keene approached the large apartment house in which the rooms of the artist were located. It was one of the best appointed houses in the desirable locality about Copley Square with a fine restaurant, café and billiard-room in a semi-basement, and well-furnished flats occupying the six floors above.

That occupied by John Wildman was on the first floor, with windows on two sides, the lofty building occupying a corner of two popular avenues.

Passing through the broad vestibule giving ingress to the office, the detective approached a clerk at the desk and asked, carelessly:

"Have you seen anything of Mr. Wildman, the artist, this morning?"

"Jack Wildman!" returned the clerk, looking up. "I think he is out of town, sir."

"Out of town?"

"I imagine so, since he has not been in his rooms for several days."

"Do you know where I can reach him by mail?"

"I do not. He left no word where he was going."

"That's curious!" observed Keene, aiming to render the clerk communicative. "Is it like him to disappoint a man on a matter of business?"

"Quite the contrary, sir. As a general thing, Mr. Wildman is very punctilious in such matters. We think it rather curious where he can have gone; still, he is a man quite able to look after himself. I imagine he will return within a few days, at the longest."

"Do you know by whom he was last seen about here?"

"The janitor saw him go out last Friday afternoon."

"Thanks, very much," bowed Keene, turning away.

"Any word to leave for him?"

"I think not. I will call again."

Returning to the vestibule, the detective next rang the janitor's bell, a summons which speedily brought a young Irishman from some quarter below.

"I am looking for John Wildman's rooms," explained Keene, in his agreeable way. "I hope you'll pardon my troubling you."

"No trouble, sir. That's what I am here for," laughed the janitor. "Mr. Wildman's rooms are off the main corridor there, but he's not at home."

"Has he gone away?"

"Went away last Friday afternoon, sir."

"That's odd," said Keene, with feigned perplexity. "Did you see him leave here?"

"I did, sir. I was standing right here in the doorway."

"Was he alone?"

"He was, sir."

"You didn't notice which way he went, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, I did. He took the cab that stands around the corner, sir; and like as not Jerry—that's the cabman, sir—can tell you where he went."

Without displaying further interest, for he did not wish to create an impression that any suspicion of foul play existed, Keene sauntered out of the door and to the corner, and presently accosted the cabman.

"Where did you drop Mr. Wildman, Jerry, when he employed you last Friday afternoon?" he asked, familiarly.

The cabman gave him a sharp glance, and wondered how he had learned his name.

"At the Vendome, sir," he replied.

"The Hotel Vendome?"

"Sure, I don't know of any other Vendome."

"Did Wildman enter the hotel?"

"He did, sir."

"He did not retain your carriage, did he?"

"No, sir. He paid his fare and I turned away. I think he went there to meet a man, sir, for he was shaking hands with a man in the office when I turned my cab."

"A short man, with gray hair, and——"

"Devil a bit of it, sir! He was a big man, with brown whiskers," interrupted the driver.

"Ah, then I am mistaken," remarked Keene, nevertheless suspecting the man to have been the Mr. McKenzie described by Mary Randall. "I am trying to locate one of Wildman's friends, whom I heard was in town. About what time did you take Wildman to the Vendome?"

"Sure, sir, it was close upon three o'clock."

At that moment Keene saw Mary Randall approaching on the opposite side of the street, and with a brief word of thanks the detective turned back and around the corner, and then quickly sought the corridor adjoining the rooms of the missing artist.

He had waited only a few minutes, when Miss Randall also entered.

Her pretty face lighted when she saw him, and, extending her hand, she said, gratefully:

"I am so glad to find you here. I feared you might have changed your mind."

"They say wise persons do so," smiled Keene, while she produced the key of the door near which they met. "Mine, however, if changed at all, leans more to your own convictions."

"You have discovered something?" she asked, eagerly.

"Nothing of importance," Keene rejoined, evasively. "Ah, this is the studio, is it?"

It was a large room facing the front street, and presented the usual characteristics of an

artist's studio. Adjoining this was a library and sitting-room, with a sleeping-room beyond. The furnishings were quite elaborate, yet in excellent taste, and denoted that the occupant was a man of culture.

The rooms were cold, however. A half-burned log lay dead and gray in the fireplace. The lace draperies hung closed at the windows, from their rods to the heavy Wilton carpet covering the floor.

Keene made a rapid survey of both the library and sleeping-room, but found nothing to suggest a solution of the mystery.

"Is there a photograph of Mr. Wildman here?" he asked, rejoining Miss Randall in the studio.

"Yes, sir, here in his album."

The picture was that of a handsome man, with frank, expressive eyes, and a broad brow.

"Is he light or dark?" demanded Keene, quickly taking in the general features.

"His hair and eyes are brown, sir."

"And his voice?"

"Very deep and mellow," said Miss Randall, with some emotion. "And when he speaks very loud, sir, it is noticeably strong and resonant."

"I infer that he is a tolerably large man."

"Nearly six feet, sir. There is also a sketch of him here in his portfolio, one he made himself," said Miss Randall, hastening to place the large leather-covered case upon the table.

It contained a score or more of crayon and charcoal sketches, and Keene had begun to study that of the profile she quickly selected and placed in his hand, when a low cry broke from the lips of the girl.

"What have you found?" demanded the detective.

"This room has been entered, sir!" cried Mary Randall, looking up, with cheeks grown suddenly pale; "and since Mr. Wild-

man's disappearance—I am sure of it, sir! Some of his sketches are missing. I was as familiar with them as if I had drawn them myself."

"Possibly Mr. Wildman removed them."

"But they have been taken away since his disappearance, sir."

"Are you sure of that!" cried Keene.

"Absolutely, sir! When I was here last Saturday morning I noticed that the portfolio had fallen open, and that its contents were likely to drop to the floor. I immediately put the sketches in place, and sentimentally felt inclined to see the picture now in your hand. In searching for it, I ran through most of the sketches, and I know there were some here then which now are missing."

The girl was speaking with a mingling of excitement and earnestness that was very convincing, and Keene quickly glanced over the sketches remaining in the case. They nearly all were landscapes, with an occasional country house, and the detective presently asked:

"Did you say you were familiar with these? Perhaps you can tell me how many are missing, and give me an idea of their character."

"Indeed, I can, Mr. Keene!" exclaimed Mary Randall, hurriedly running them over. "There are six or eight missing, sir. Three of them were rural scenes; one was that of an old English castle; another that of a picturesque suburban residence, and one a sketch of the river Thames. All of these were drawn by Mr. Wildman during a visit to England."

"Did he say they were sketched during a visit to England?" demanded Keene. "Did he use the word visit?"

"I am sure he did, sir!" exclaimed Mary Randall, looking up with startled eyes. "Why do you speak so strangely, sir?"

"Because, Miss Randall," replied Keene,

gravely; "I am much more inclined to believe that Mr. Wildman, whom you have suspected to be an Englishman, drew the missing sketches from memory, depicting some of the scenes which, perhaps, were dear to him in that early life of which you have been left uninformed."

"And even then?" faltered the girl, tremulously, with a great fear showing in her lifted eyes.

Keene regarded her in silence for a moment, then decided it was best that she should know all that this unexpected discovery suggested to him.

"Even then?" he echoed, taking her hand; "do you not see what such a theft, under such circumstances, would imply?"

"What, sir?"

"That some person has deemed the removal of the sketches to be essential to his own safety, or at least essential to preventing the establishment of John Wildman's true identity. It is a hundred to one, Miss Randall, that your lover's name is not John Wildman."

"Oh, sir!"

"And that his disappearance, if not the result of foul play, is a mystery which requires at least earnest and immediate investigation. But do not be over-alarmed, Miss Randall," Keene hastened to add, when the girl sank, half-fainting, into a chair near the window. "I do not think it is a case of murder, for it has not that appearance; I rather think that Wildman is now in the power of some person or persons, whose interests may be identified with him, and who may be seeking in some way to coerce him."

"Then his death——"

"You must not apprehend that," Keene quickly interrupted. "Few men dare the scaffold for the sake of gain; and the hope of gain here appears to be the most likely motive, since Wildman has for years been a resident of this country. It is more than probable that the person who entered and

stole the missing sketches obtained the key from John Wildman himself, and that alone convinces me that——"

But a sudden movement by Mary Randall there interrupted him.

With a half-suppressed cry, she had quickly risen and drawn back from the window, to stare out with startled gaze through the lace draperies at some object in the street.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRANGER FROM LONDON.

Startled by the expression on Mary Randall's white face, Keene's impulse was to draw aside the lace curtains to ascertain by what she had been moved and at what she was gazing. But she caught his extended arm and drew him back, crying quickly:

"Don't! Don't let him see you—not here! Not in here!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"There—on the opposite corner. The man who called at the library to see me."

"McKenzie?"

"Yes, McKenzie! I saw him look this way, but he cannot see through the draperies. He is now pretending to have no interest in this direction, yet the very expression on his face affrighted me when I first saw him gazing this way."

Sheridan Keene easily spotted the man on the corner twenty yards distant, and stood briefly studying him.

It was Tracy Maxwell.

As the moth flies at the flame which consumes him, so this Englishman was tempting the fate he most dreaded.

Yet his conduct was not without a serious incentive. The deductions drawn by Keene had been true to the letter. After the execution of his infamous design with Dr. Kennedy, Maxwell had indeed secured the key from the person of his half-brother, and had secretly entered the artist's studio for the

purpose of destroying any evidence which might serve even to suggest the true identity of Wildman. He had found only the sketches missed by Mary Randall, which were drawings from memory of the artist's home in England, and these Maxwell had decided should be immediately removed and destroyed.

It had been easy to accomplish this unobserved by any person in the house, and Maxwell's call upon Mary Randall had been only to discover if any suspicions of the true state of affairs existed, and if any action to locate Wildman was being taken. That suspicion could possibly be directed against him had seemed utterly improbable.

"He is coming this way!" Keene suddenly cried, as Maxwell started over the crossing. "It is a safe guess that he is coming here."

"What shall we do?"

Keene glanced at the girl's face. It was very pale, and she trembled from head to foot. Quickly taking her hands, the detective said, firmly:

"You must compose yourself. If the man is coming here, I want you to receive him precisely as if no suspicions existed. Can you do this? It is for the sake of the man you love."

"Yes, I can do it!" exclaimed Miss Randall, with a quick display of resolution. "What explanation shall I offer him for being here?"

"Say you're seeking for a letter Wildman possibly might have left, or for any evidence tending to explain his absence."

"I understand."

"Make no mention of me."

"Surely not."

"Hasten, then. Replace the portfolio precisely as you found it," cried Keene, darting to the studio door to make sure it was closed.

"And you, Mr. Keene?"

"I shall conceal myself until after his de-

parture," Keene hurriedly explained. "I wish to observe him and hear his voice. Have no fear, Miss Randall, but receive him precisely as if——"

"He is coming, sir. Leave him to me."

The sound of Maxwell's footsteps could be heard on the floor of the adjoining corridor.

Keene slipped noiselessly into the library and entered a closet in one corner, from which he cautiously could observe all that transpired.

Mary Randall had already replaced the portfolio, and when Maxwell's sharp knock sounded upon the studio door she ran to a desk at one side of the room and pretended to be searching among the papers by which it was partly covered.

Turning her head merely, she cried, firmly: "Come in!"

Maxwell was more than surprised to receive a response to his knock. He had not expected that it would be answered. He opened the door, however, and on beholding Mary Randall, he immediately concluded her mission to be what Keene had suggested, and that his first apprehension was groundless.

But his florid face, with its swift expression of relief, betrayed him to the watching detective as effectively as if he had given utterance to his secret sentiments.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" Maxwell quickly exclaimed. "When I received a response to my knock, I was in hopes to have found Mr. Wildman here."

Miss Randall immediately arose and faced him. Though still quite pale, she commanded herself admirably, and at once replied:

"Mr. Wildman has not yet returned, sir."

"Indeed!"

"I am very mystified by his absence and begin to feel quite anxious," the girl explained, in a conventional way. "Having a key to his rooms, I have been looking over his papers again, in the hope of discovering

something that might explain his unusual absence."

"Can I be of any assistance to you?" asked Maxwell, bowing politely.

"Oh, no, sir. I do not wish to disturb things too much. I presume he will return sooner or later, and that my apprehensions are, as a matter of fact, quite groundless."

"You do not fear that anything serious has befallen him, I hope?"

"No, I do not precisely fear it, sir; yet I feel rather anxious. Mr. Wildman is not often absent for so long a time. Still, he is a man of good habits, and I cannot believe he has made any enemies."

"Assuredly not!" exclaimed Maxwell, with feeling. "What little I have seen of him would certainly indicate the making of friends, rather than enemies. I really hope I may meet him again before leaving Boston."

"Have you business with him, sir?"

"I intended to have had," was the grave reply. "I have thought some of giving him an order for a painting. Perhaps I shall find him here by the first of the week."

"I hope so, sir. Indeed," added the girl, smiling faintly; "I really think so."

"And you are quite welcome to the belief," said Maxwell to himself, as he bowed with grave courtesy and made his departure.

Keene waited till the sound of his steps had died away in the corridor; then he quickly emerged from his concealment and peered out through the curtain. Maxwell was crossing the street, and walking moderately in the direction of Copley Square.

"You did well," said Keene, approvingly, turning quickly to Miss Randall.

"And that man?"

"Leave the man to me. I must follow him at once."

"You suspect him?"

"Seriously," said Keene, hurriedly. "Hereafter you must remain away from these

rooms, and do nothing about this affair until you have heard from me."

"I'll not, sir. I'll go at once."

"And if McKenzie should again visit you at the library, say no more to him than you have said this morning. Do you understand?"

"Precisely!" exclaimed Miss Randall, in some excitement.

"That is all, then!" cried Keene. "I will communicate with you as soon as possible."

Having hurriedly issued these instructions, the detective hastened out upon the street and started in pursuit of Maxwell, whom he presently overtook in Copley Square. Five minutes later the Englishman entered the Brunswick Hotel, with Sheridan Keene just behind him.

It immediately became evident that Maxwell was a guest of the house, and that his appointment with Wildman at the Vendome had been a blind, which Keene at once added to his list of suspicious circumstances.

Removing his coat, Maxwell left it in the coat-room, receiving a check for it, and Keene presently did likewise. As he took his check, and the youth in charge of the room turned to hang the coat on the wall, the detective pushed open the door and entered.

"I have a book in one of the pockets, young man," he explained. "I wish to remove it."

"All right, sir," nodded the employee, stepping aside.

Keene felt in the pocket of his own coat, at the same time turning the collar of that which he recognized to be Maxwell's, and glanced at the tailor's trademark. He read, in yellow letters on the back:

"Bailey & Co., London."

"Another link in the chain," he said to himself, as he turned from the room and entered the large main office.

That Maxwell had not the slightest appre-

hension that his movements were being observed, was manifest in his actions. With no apparent interest in any of the gentlemen about the office, the Englishman entered the telephone closet a little later, and for five minutes held communication over the wire. When he emerged there was a smile on his face, and he strode straight away through the corridor toward the main stairs.

He had not disappeared before Sheridan Keene slipped into the telephone closet and rang up the central office.

"Hello!" he cried.

"Hello!"

"Have you still got the wire I just had?" he demanded of the girl at the central station.

"No, sir; you rang off," was the reply.

"Never mind, then. Do you recall the number I gave you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Let me have it, please. It will save my looking it up again. I wish to use it later."

The girl immediately called back a suburban number.

"Thanks," cried Keene, dryly, replacing the instrument.

Having noted the number upon paper, he next consulted the hotel register. At the end of five minutes he had established the fact that Mr. Robert McKenzie of London, England, had been a guest at the Brunswick for precisely fourteen days.

"Now for the telephone exchange!" he said to himself, with an expression of grim satisfaction. "Finally this mystery is beginning to take a definite shape!"

It required a half-hour for him to locate the exchange number, and the moment his gaze fell upon the name joined therewith the truth broke upon him like a revelation.

"Dr. Felix Kennedy! The asylum for the insane!" he exclaimed, triumphantly, under his breath. "By Jove! there is a more des-

perate game afoot than I have imagined. This Kennedy does not enjoy the best of reputations, and it is long odds that John Wildman is now within the walls of his asylum."

Taking a chair in the office, Keene devoted a half-hour to carefully considering the situation. The evidence thus far secured indicated that the probable outrage had been committed by men actuated by no ordinary incentive, and that they would halt at nothing desperate to prevent the miscarriage of their designs, or to avert their own exposure. Direct action against them might prove futile. Kennedy's institution offered rare opportunities for knavery; and the confinement of a man, or even his murder, might be effected and the truth forever concealed, should circumstances arise to require it.

"It will not do to chance a search warrant. The hazard is too great. Should these parties become alarmed by discovering that they are suspected, they may successfully end the man and get him out of the way, if it has not already been done," Keene shrewdly reasoned.

"There is but one other method," he finally decided, with a glow of grim resolution in his dark eyes. "I must get into that asylum though it takes a leg! And it must be accomplished without delay!"

CHAPTER V.

A HOPELESS CASE.

It was nearly one o'clock of the same day, and Jason Stone's fine restaurant, which occupies a prominent corner in the suburban district less than a mile from Kennedy's asylum, was comfortably filled with its usual midday patrons. Two only of the damask-covered tables were without one or more occupants, and one of these was about midway of the deep, attractively-frescoed room.

It was the hour of the day when business was the most brisk, and half a score of col-

cred waiters were hurrying to and fro. The patrons were about equally divided, gentlemen and ladies; and both the restaurant and the square outside presented the usual lively scene of noonday.

Very little attention was at first paid to the man who presently entered and took a seat at a vacant table in the middle of the room. Yet his garments were rather inferior, and he wore a dark flannel shirt with a red tie, in place of the immaculate linen which ordinarily was a part of the dress of Detective Sheridan Keene.

It had required two solid hours and a conference with Chief Inspector Watts before Keene had perfected his arrangements for the hazardous strategy he was about to undertake; and he had arrived in the square outside only five minutes before.

On the opposite side a physician's carriage was standing, with the doctor himself loitering near by, and twenty feet from the restaurant door one of the local policemen had halted on the curbing.

Keene made a round of the square, and to each of these he gave a few hurried words of instruction, which would have suggested to any chance hearer that their meeting had been prearranged, and that there was something in the wind. There was none who observed them, however, and a moment later the detective entered the restaurant.

A few pairs of eyes were turned curiously upon him as he passed down the room, for his own were taking on a strange and utterly abnormal glare.

His manner was composed, however, and not until he had taken his seat at the table, which was one of the most prominent in the room, did he attract unusual attention.

Then he startled all observers by hanging his hat on the silver caster, and a waiter hastened forward, amid the ripple of laughter which followed the extraordinary act, and quickly interfered.

"That's no place for your hat, sir!" he cried, in a sharp undertone. "Here! I'll take it."

"Don't lose it!" protested Keene, with a quick upward glance. "It's the only one I have."

"I'll not lose it, sir. What's the matter with you? Are you drunk?"

"No; I wish I was," retorted Keene, with a cheerful laugh. "Do I look it?"

"You look all right, sir."

"Oh, I am all right enough," cried the detective, adroitly slipping a bank-note into the waiter's ready hand. "I am hungry instead of drunk. Here, where is your programme?"

"Bill of fare, sir!"

"Same thing! Bring a tureen of ox-tail, a chicken saute, some French peas, and plenty of mashed potatoes. And, say! bring 'em all at once, for I lose my appetite by waiting."

The tip had won the waiter, and he hastened away to serve the order; but Keene's voice had not been moderated, and his extraordinary remarks had reached the ears of those at the nearer tables. All eyes were now turned toward him, to which he appeared utterly oblivious, and whispered remarks were passed from one to another concerning him.

"He's intoxicated, isn't he?"

"He doesn't look as if he'd been drinking,"

"Some eccentric fellow, probably."

"Notice how his eyes glitter."

"I believe the man is crazy," a timid girl supplemented the above by anxiously observing.

"What's he doing now?"

For Keene, apparently without eyes or ears for those observing him, was now arranging the dishes in a way to suit his own fancy, making a long row of salt and pepper shakers, a pickle jar, three cruets from the caster, a glass of ice-water, and the sugar bowl and creamer, until the line stretched across the table.

"Here, what are you up to?" remonstrated the waiter, now returning to serve his order.

"Making-a telephone circuit," cried Keene, laughing. "I want to call up Heaven."

"I'll call up the proprietor if you don't let up," protested the waiter, hurriedly replacing the disturbed articles.

"We can't stand for this, you know," he remonstrated, softly, as he arranged on the table the various dishes ordered by the detective. "I do not like to turn you out of here after your generous tip, sir, but d'ye see how everybody's staring at you?"

"I'll not bother them if they don't bother me."

"But you'll have to be quiet, sir. Here's your spoon."

"Bring a dish of pudding and an ice-cream. I won't take me long to get outside of what there is here."

The waiter thought of the two dollars in his pocket, and taking a chance that the extraordinary visitor would be diverted by his meal, he hastened away to bring the additional order.

The minute his back was turned, however, Keene went to work again with renewed and ludicrous earnestness, to the intense amusement of all observers.

Within a half-minute he had a string of dishes clear across the table, his tureen of oxtail soup in the middle, garnished on either side by a plate of chicken saute and a dish of French peas.

Then, as if imagining this arrangement to be a telephone exchange, such as is used in the central offices, he caught up an empty tumbler and placed it over his ear, while with the other hand he proceeded rapidly to stick salt and pepper shakers and small butter dishes into the food before him.

At the same time he began calling loudly, amid the uproar of laughter from those nearer observers who had caught onto his whim:

"Hello! hello! Give me 4-11-44 Frankfort! Who's this? Yes, he's in—wait a minute, I'll call him. Hello! hello! I want Central—yes—waiting! Yes, they're going to call us up from Heaven! Hello——"

"Here, here! you'll have to stop this!" cried a second waiter, now rushing up to the table.

"Don't bother me!" exclaimed Keene, thrusting him away. "Don't you see I am busy? Hello! there, Central! Give me Heaven, if you can get it! I want——"

"I'll call an officer!" cried the waiter, rushing toward the door.

"Hold on, I'll call him for you!" yelled Keene, changing the salt shaker from the mashed potatoes and jabbing it into a dish of squash.

A roar of laughter followed this move, but it was fairly silenced by the repeated cries of the detective himself.

"Hello, Central, have you got that number? What's that—busy? Go to blazes! Tell them I can't wait. Ring off that other party and connect me—what? Hello! Central—never mind! Here comes some one who'll do just as well!"

This diversion was a Salvation Army lass, who was venturing to approach him to sell a *War Cry*. When he saw her his face lighted up, and his final calls over the imaginary wire rose above the general uproar in the room.

"Hello! hello! I've got the last edition. Tell them I'll see them later, and—what's that? Ring off? All right!"

With which, and amid an utterly indescribable tumult, he quickly transferred the pepper shaker from the plate of chicken into the tureen of oxtail soup, and, dropping the tumbler to the floor with a crash, he thrust a silver dollar into the hand of the astonished Army girl. By this time the proprietor of the restaurant, as well as half of

the men in the room, were gathered excitedly about the table; and the waiter now was returning with a policeman, the same to whom Keene had spoken outside.

"Hello!" cried the detective, starting up; "here comes the devil in uniform! I told you I'd call him up. What——"

"What's the matter with you, my man?" sternly interrupted the officer, forcing his way through the crowd and seizing Keene by the collar.

The detective burst out laughing, a laugh that rose with wild and unnatural shrillness over all other sounds.

"There's nothing the matter with me!" he cried, with a vacant glare in his dilated eyes. "The trouble's all with you. Why do you collar me when——"

"You come along with me!"

"The man is crazy," interrupted an observer. "Handle him more gently."

"Send for a doctor!" cried another.

"Here's Dr. Cabot!" now exclaimed a third. "Make way and let him pass."

In the face of advice and protests, however, Keene was quickly hustled out upon the sidewalk, where, to blind the crowd which followed, the physician hurriedly examined and questioned him, and speedily declared him to be affected with all the symptoms of insanity.

"The station is not a proper place for him," he peremptorily added to the officer, who still held Keene in charge. "Take him up to the asylum for the present, at least. Call a carriage. I'll go with you, officer. This man is not safe to be at large."

And within another five minutes Detective Keene had been unceremoniously thrust into a carriage, and with the officer and physician on the opposite seat, was being rapidly driven in the direction of Dr. Felix Kennedy's grim institution a mile away.

It was nearly two o'clock when they arrived in the *porte cochere* at the main en-

trance. From his office window Dr. Kennedy had seen the carriage approaching and had recognized the driver. It was nothing unusual for the local physician to bring a patient who had suddenly become violently insane upon the street, or in the station-house, and the medical opinion of Dr. Cabot in such cases was all-sufficient to Dr. Kennedy.

For the latter was always ready to receive a new patient. It meant money in his pocket and that was by far his chief consideration. He met the carriage at the door with an expression of grave solicitude on his crafty face, and Sheridan Keene, with hair disheveled and garments disordered, and with an utterly abnormal countenance, was removed from the hack and into the asylum reception-room.

Dr. Kennedy made only a brief examination of the detective, who ignored his command to be seated, and fell instantly to pacing the floor.

"He was badly taken in Stone's restaurant, and I ordered him brought here," Dr. Cabot explained. "I've questioned him, and made a partial examination. He is evidently affected with religious mania."

"Do you know the man?"

"He says his name is John Moran, and that he lives at the West End. Perhaps we can find something in his pockets by which he may be positively identified."

Dr. Kennedy touched a button on the wall, and the summons almost instantly brought a powerful, dark-visaged fellow into the room, who evidently was one of the asylum attendants.

"Toby," said Dr. Kennedy shortly, "search this man."

Both physicians stood indifferently near by during the operation, while Sheridan Keene maintained, with consummate tact, the delicate and difficult part he was playing. All of

his belongings were removed from his pockets, and he had included among them a letter containing the address of one Martha Moran, and which apparently was a letter from his sister.

"I'll communicate with her and explain the circumstances," said Dr. Cabot. "The man had better remain here until we hear from her, and learn more about him."

"By all means," assented Dr. Kennedy, with an eye to his fees. "He certainly has a bad look."

"I'll advise you by telephone as soon as I have heard."

"Very well, doctor," bowed Kennedy, as the local physician withdrew. "Give the man a room in ward A, Toby, in the south wing."

"That wing is full, sir," growled the attendant, bluntly. "There's no room vacant except in the north wing, on the fourth floor, sir, above——"

"Silence!" cried Dr. Kennedy, with a sudden commanding ferocity, which startled even Sheridan Keene, and instantly aroused his suspicions.

But the dark face of Toby evinced no surprise, and he appeared utterly indifferent to Kennedy's abrupt display of violence.

"Use your tongue more discreetly," the latter sternly added, with an ugly fire in his frowning eyes. "Put the man in the ward you mentioned, then, and see that he is watched. One moment!"

"Well?"

"Until his identity and condition are more definitely known, give him your personal attention. Do you understand?"

Toby merely nodded and smiled significantly.

Then taking Keene roughly by the shoulder, he led him away.

CHAPTER VI.

BEHIND THE ASYLUM BARS.

Sheridan Keene was not sorry when he approached the room to which Toby conducted him. The part he had been playing had been arduous, and he longed for a relaxation from the strain.

Their way led through several long corridors, which were divided by heavy doors, which Toby unlocked with a key taken from his pocket. Finally they climbed three gloomy stairways, and entered a ward-room on an upper floor. From this room about a dozen doors gave ingress to as many smaller rooms on either side, all of which were closed.

Only two persons were encountered, and these were in the ward-room mentioned. Both were middle-aged men, evidently inmates of the place, for they were pacing aimlessly to and fro, with their hands in their pockets and their eyes fixed vacantly on the floor. Neither bestowed more than a brief glance at the detective when he entered with the attendant, and Toby quickly led him to one of the corner rooms.

"You're to stay in here till I bring your supper," he said, roughly, as he thrust Keene into the room. "And make no noise, mind you, or you'll go into a strait-jacket."

"What am I here for?"

"You're here because you've got a breeze in your cupola, that's why," said Toby, fishing out a huge ring of keys. "Now look that you keep quiet, or it'll be the worse for you."

"But I'll not stay here alone," said Keene, with feigned resentment.

"Oh, you won't!" retorted the attendant, with a threatening look and gesture. "We'll see about it. If you try kicking down the door, I'll do a little kicking myself. Remember that, if you think well of trying to get out."

And the burly attendant, brutal alike in looks and bearing, sharply closed the door and locked it from the ward-room adjoining.

Keene heaved a sigh of relief and smiled grimly.

"Well, here I am!" he said to himself, tossing off his hat and taking a seat on the narrow bed which the room afforded. "Now to think things over a bit and see what can be done."

He had in mind the various corridors through which he had passed, and the heavy doors between. Each section of the grim institution was divided from the others like the quarters of a large prison. Secret communication from one to another was next to impossible, and the locating of John Wildman, if he was indeed confined there, appeared like a hopeless task.

But Keene was not a man to be daunted by danger or difficulties, and after a brief rest he made a careful survey of his surroundings.

The room assigned him contained only a bed, a wash-stand and one common wooden chair. There was a small closet in one corner, and escape from the single window was prevented by three iron bars set in the stone-work outside.

A brief examination from the window gave him his location.

He was in a northern wing of the building and on the upper floor. The window was fully fifty feet from the ground, and by peering down between the bars he could see that the windows below were likewise guarded; and he inferred that he was in that part of the building in which dangerous patients were confined.

"There is a chance, then, that Wildman is somewhere near me," he reasoned, "since they would place him in a room from which he could not effect his escape. But it will be a tough job locating him, if he has not already been done away with."

He could see no other elevation of the building, however, and his study of the situation was speedily concluded.

He remained alone until nearly dusk, when Toby again put in an appearance, bringing with him a tray of food and a pitcher of water.

"Here's your grub," he said, bluntly, as he deposited the tray on the wash-stand. "Eat it while I am looking after the other loons in this ward, then get yourself into bed."

Keene resumed his normal manner and aspect, and decided to comply. He knew that but little provocation would be required to meet with very brutal treatment from this attendant, and he was not desirous of being abused.

"I'll defer that part of the affair until I am in receipt of my arsenal!"

This was the detective's thought, as he complied with Toby's latter command and prepared himself for bed.

The hours that followed passed slowly and wearily enough. Evening came on and darkness settled round the grim and dismal institution, and scarce a sound broke the general silence.

At eight o'clock, Toby again thrust his head into the room, and gave vent to an approving growl on observing that Keene was in bed. There was no light save that from the ward-room, and the attendant again locked the door and left the detective in darkness.

Keene heard him making his round of the other rooms, and it was evident the fear he inspired served to keep the occupants in general subjection. As a matter of fact, he was not sorry that his own room was locked when Toby's steps finally died away in the ward-room and a silence like that of a tomb fell upon the place.

He had had no hope of accomplishing anything that night, yet at the end of a half-

hour the silence was broken by a sound which instantly claimed his attention. It was very faint, barely audible, in fact; yet the occasion of it could not be mistaken.

It was only the dull vibrations which at such a time can be detected through thick walls, when the voices of men are used with more than ordinary volume.

"By gracious, there's a dispute going on in one of the rooms!" muttered Keene, rising upon his pillow to listen. "And the sound seems to come from below."

Rising quickly from the bed he laid his ear to the floor.

"I am right! There are men in the room under this, and they are having a bitter word fight over something. Kennedy would not be disputing with a patient, yet I'd swear that was his voice."

Only a practiced ear could have detected this, for the vibrations were so faint that any other sound would have completely drowned them. Even the rapid beating of Keene's heart at times seemed the louder.

For a minute or more he laid prone upon the floor with his ear pressed to the wood. Then he caught the deeper resonance of a voice abruptly raised in anger, and the words of Mary Randall recurred to him with sudden resistless force.

"She said his voice was of that sort when he spoke very loud," muttered Keene, with an irrepressible thrill. "If that was Kennedy whom I heard, it's a hundred to one that Wildman is in the room below me. That would explain Kennedy's presence. That would explain the dispute. I'll wager it is a safe conjecture that I have located the man."

Even the assurance of this would have been but little advantage had Keene no resource beyond his individual efforts; and while any doubt existed regarding Wildman, the detective realized that only by artifice

could he surely prevent the knavery of which he firmly believed the physician and Englishman to be guilty.

Early next morning a well-dressed woman presented herself at the asylum, and was received by Dr. Kennedy in the reception-room.

"I am Miss Moran, of Charles street," she gravely explained, with all the dignity and grace of a lady used to society. "I am a sister of the young man who was brought here yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, yes; I now recall the name!" exclaimed Dr. Kennedy, at once deciding her to be a woman of means. "Pray be seated, Miss Moran. We have taken the best of care of your—brother, did you say?"

"Yes, my only brother, poor fellow!" bowed Miss Moran, wiping her eyes. "I should have come out here yesterday, had I not been absent when Dr. Cabot's message came informing me of my brother's illness. I have had the same trouble with him before, doctor, and at times find him quite unmanageable."

"He appeared to be in a rather poor state," replied Dr. Kennedy, with an expression of grave sympathy on his crafty face. "I have visited him several times in his room, and he is now more quiet."

"I am so glad to hear that, doctor."

The designing physician thought he saw a way of turning a few dollars, and continued his lie.

"At first I thought his case hopeless," he said, gravely; "but since I have observed him more closely I believe his disorder would yield to proper medical treatment. He really should have that, Miss Moran, and the constant observation of his condition which a capable and experienced physician might give to it."

With pathetic earnestness Miss Moran leaned nearer and asked:

"Would it be possible to effect an arrangement with you, Dr. Kennedy, by which he could be detained here for a time and given such treatment?"

"Yes, I think so," bowed Dr. Kennedy, with impressive deliberation. "I really see no reason why not, if my terms should prove satisfactory."

"Your terms, doctor, would be of secondary consideration," said Miss Moran, much as if the National Treasury was behind her.

"Surely, then, there is no reason!" said Dr. Kennedy, with gracious warmth.

"We will perfect such an arrangement later, then."

"At your own pleasure, Miss Moran."

"Is my brother so that I could see him this morning, doctor?"

"I think so," bowed Kennedy, who really knew nothing at all about it. "I left him quite composed a short time ago. I will call my attendant from that ward."

Miss Moran waited for a few minutes, and then Mr. Toby appeared with the announcement that she could see young Mr. Moran in his room.

"I would not excite him," said Dr. Kennedy, in a cautionary way, as she arose to go. "And if you contemplate leaving him here for treatment, I would not encourage him in any desire to depart."

"Oh, I surely will not, doctor! It will be a great relief to me if we can make the arrangement suggested."

"I will see you in my office, then, before you go."

Miss Moran bowed gracefully and withdrew. She had made a decidedly favorable impression upon the knavish doctor, both with her stylish beauty and the evident ease with which she might be separated from her money.

But crafty Dr. Kennedy would probably have suffered an apoplectic shock had he for an instant suspected the truth.

For this woman's visit was a part of the strategy designed by Sheridan Keene and Chief Inspector Watts; and Miss Moran was not Miss Moran by any means. For her name was Margaret Macey, and was by a wide margin the cleverest woman associated with the city secret service.

With tears in her eyes, she followed Toby through the devious corridors and up the several stairways, and her meeting with Sheridan Keene in his room was enacted with all the cleverness that can be imagined. So well was it done, that Toby, after listening briefly outside the open door, decided that he was wasting his time, and forthwith strode away to subdue a refractory lunatic at the opposite end of the ward.

The moment Keene heard him depart his manner abruptly changed.

"Lively, now, Maggie!" he exclaimed, in a low whisper. "Have you brought my guns?"

"Surely, Shed!" and the woman dove into her skirt pockets and quickly produced both of Keene's revolvers and placed them in his hands.

"Good!" he exclaimed, thrusting one into either of his hip pockets. "These would make a new man of one in this place. Have you seen Kennedy?"

"Yes."

"Does he suspect anything?"

"Not a thing. All is working as was planned."

"Can you blind him still farther?"

"I can turn him blind as a bat," whispered the woman, with a laugh.

"Then you must come here again to-day."

"For what?"

"I want thirty feet of line, strong enough to bear my weight, also a steel saw that will cut yonder bars."

"I'll bring them to you. Anything more?"

"That's all."

"Leave it to me, then. Have you located Wildman?"

"I am not sure," replied Keene, speaking in low, rapid whispers. "If I was, I would act at once. The man must be discovered first of all, to make the thing sure."

"What do you suspect?"

"That he is in the room under this. I heard voices last night from there, and Kennedy silenced a remark from his attendant when they assigned me this room, which now increases my suspicion."

"And you want the line and saw——"

"That I may descend the face of the wall outside. I am going down to the window below mine to-night, if the move is possible. I must learn who is in that room, and it can be accomplished in no other way without awakening suspicion."

"You'll need oil or soap."

"I've soap in the washstand."

"Then I'll surely smuggle the line and——"

"Hush! the attendant!"

Toby's step was heard approaching. He was met almost on the threshold by the departing young woman, with sobs shaking her and her face buried in her handkerchief.

"I—I suppose I can bring him some flowers and—and delicacies, can't I?" she asked, looking up at him with tears rolling from her eyes.

"Yes, ma'am, if Dr. Kennedy says so," bluntly returned Toby, too calloused to be moved by anything like a woman's tears.

But Dr. Kennedy readily said so—after the clever woman had paid him a fifty-dollar note for the first week of her brother's board and treatment, and expressed herself as wishing to leave him there indefinitely.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon before she returned, bringing a basket of fruit and flowers in her hand—and thirty feet of line and a pair of steel saws fastened to her snowy skirts.

Although in no degree suspicious, Toby did

not leave them in the room alone on this occasion, and yet the woman did not find it necessary to prolong her visit.

She sat on the detective's bed during the entire time.

And when she departed she left the smuggled articles beneath it, despite Toby's presence near the open door.

CHAPTER VII.

A DESPERATE MOVE.

The night proved well adapted to the design of Sheridan Keene.

It was a night of alternate gloom and starlight; with the sweep of the October wind about the corners and cornices of the grim asylum to drown the sounds he necessarily made.

Toby's final round of that ward was usually made about eight o'clock, and he found Sheridan Keene in bed. He crossed the room to make sure the window was closed, and then departed, locking the door after him and leaving the detective in darkness.

"Good-night!" said Keene to himself, as he heard the key turn in the door. "And take heed you don't return, lest you are met by a bullet."

At the end of a quarter-hour he stole out of bed and listened at the door. Not a sound met his strained ears, and without delay he slipped into his clothes and prepared for the hazardous work before him.

When he softly opened the window the cold night air was like a refreshing draught. The stars were visible in the sky; the distant lights of the town could be seen through the trees; fifty feet below him lay a portion of the verdant grounds by which the asylum was surrounded, and the yellow driveway of sand and gravel.

From some remote quarter of the grim institution the shrill cry of some noisy inmate

was brought to his ears, like the distant cry of some night bird, then borne away upon the wind and lost in the ensuing silence.

Procuring the cake of soap from the washstand, Keene now went rapidly to work upon the middle bar of his window, stilling the grating of the saw with frequent applications of soap, and throwing all his strength into his efforts.

It required a quarter-hour to cut through the lower end of the bar, and then he tried his strength at bending it.

The result was better than he expected. Instead of bending, the bar broke away from the cement in the capstone of the window, and was loose in his hand. With a muttered ejaculation of satisfaction, he drew it into the room and laid it carefully under his bed.

All of this work was being done in the darkness, but the eyes of men are not wholly unlike the eyes of cats, and gloom becomes less intense the longer it is endured.

The removal of the bar left a space wide enough for the passage of his body, and without delay Keene next secured the line to one of the remaining bars. It reached several feet below the window under his own, and that was all he required. That he could regain his own room, after having made the descent, he had not a doubt.

These preparations having been made, he removed his shoes and hat, made sure his weapons were secure in his pockets; and without a thought of personal danger, of a fall of fifty feet to the ground below, he forced his muscular figure between the bars. Holding fast to each, he kneeled on the stonework outside and gazed briefly at the window below.

The room evidently was in total darkness. Only the gloomy pane, and the darker lines of the iron bars, met his searching gaze. He waited only for a moment, however, then muttered under his breath:

"Well, here goes!"

Working his toes down the stone face of the wall until he could rest his body on the sill, he firmly gripped the line and swung himself clear. It was an undertaking which only one man in a thousand, save he was a sailor, would have dared; yet not for a moment had Keene faltered or felt the chill of fear.

Hand under hand, foot by foot, he made the perilous descent, until he could place his knee upon the lower window and grasp one of the iron bars. Then he swung the line out of his way, and paused for a moment to listen.

Looking up to his own room, he could see it still was in darkness, and he felt assured that his own movements had not yet been overheard, and that his design could not possibly have been suspected.

The room into which he now could gaze was in Egyptian darkness. For the first time since he began the work he was fearful of failure. Yet he knew he could replace the bar at his own window sufficiently well to escape cursory observation, and that failure then and there need not necessarily prove fatal. But so much was then in the balance that he dreaded inviting perhaps the worst.

Not a sound came from within the room. Only the sweep of the wind along the face of the wall, and the more remote sighing of the trees, broke the night silence.

Twining his left arm around one of the bars, and settling himself securely on the stonework of the window, Keene nerved himself for whatever might occur, and tapped softly on the pane.

He received no answer.

"By Heaven!" he muttered. "Can I have come too late? Can they already have done away with him?"

Now he clenched his hand, and with the knuckles of it knocked sharply on the closed window. A deep groan then reached his ears, followed by a sudden sharp cry.

He heard the bed in the room creak noisily, as if some person was hurriedly rising; and then, against the intense darkness within, and as vague in outline as the figure of an apparition, he beheld a form take shape and approach the window.

It was the figure of a man.

A single word issued from his lips when he became sure that, in the dim starlight outside, he saw what at first he believed to be only the hallucination of madness, or the vision of a dream.

"Help!"

Then his face was pressed against the pane, with his ghastly cheeks discernible through the darkness, and his eyes aglow as if with a light of their own.

With a feeling of exultation which he could by no means suppress, Keene drew closer to the window and demanded, as loudly as he dared:

"What is your name?"

The answer came back but faintly through the glass:

"Maxwell Wildman!"

"Are you John Wildman?"

"Yes, and Horace Maxwell."

Keene now understood.

"He has given me both names," he muttered; triumphantly.

"I want help."

"Open the window!" commanded the detective.

"I can't! I am in a strait-jacket."

Then Keene discovered that the man's arms were powerless, being held securely to either side in a canvas jacket, which laced in the back.

"Stand away from the window," Keene now commanded, with a gesture. "I'll take a chance to being overheard and break it. It is too dangerous to talk long so loudly."

Wildman nodded and withdrew across the room.

With his left arm still entwined about the iron bar, and his figure securely resting on the stonework, Keene now drew a revolver and with the butt dealt one of the panes a sharp blow. It shivered the glass, which fell clattering upon the stones and on the floor within.

In a moment Wildman rejoined him, and their voices were lowered.

"Are you John Wildman, the artist?" demanded Keene.

"Yes," was the eager response. "But you—who are you? And why here in such a perilous position?"

"My name is Keene. I am a Boston detective. I am here to aid you."

"Thank God!"

"You are in the power of knaves?"

"Worse than knaves—monsters!"

"Do you know with what object they have confined you?"

"I discovered it only last night. I am an Englishman. My father recently died and has left me a large fortune, which a half-brother now aims to secure through my murder."

"About what I suspected!" exclaimed Keene.

"I was told the facts only last night."

"How was that?"

"My brother's confederate——"

"His name is Kennedy," interposed Keene.

"He came here last night and disclosed the whole truth to me. He offered to turn traitor to my half-brother, and release me, providing I would insure him one-half of my fortune."

"You refused."

"Positively! We had angry words, and he threatened to kill me within forty-eight hours unless I should come to his terms."

"This explains the voices I heard. Why did you not consent, and then have him arrested?"

"That went against my grain. I am a man

of my word, and preferred to take my chances."

"Is your half-brother named McKenzie?"

"He is so called, but his right name is Tracy Maxwell. I had not seen him since he was a boy, hence did not recognize him. I ran away from home eighteen years ago."

"How were you brought here?"

"I was deceived."

"By McKenzie?"

"Yes. He pretended he wished me to paint a scene out this way, and prevailed on me to come out and view it, that I might give him my ideas upon the subject. When passing along the road below here, he stated that the doctor who conducts this asylum was an old acquaintance and friend, and asked me to accompany him here while he made a brief call."

"And you did so?"

"Why not? I suspected nothing."

"And after you had entered?"

"I was invited to inspect the building, and felt an interest in so doing. An attendant came with us. On reaching this room I was suddenly seized and overcome. Since then I have been constantly in a strait-jacket, and utterly helpless."

"Are you suffering?"

"Somewhat. My muscles are severely cramped and sore. I care nothing for the suffering, however, if my rescue can but be effected."

"Leave that to me," said Keene, grimly. "How many patients are there in the ward upon which your room opens?"

"Not one! I am alone here."

"Ah, these scoundrels indeed mean bloodshed."

"I fear there is no doubt of that."

"We'll thwart them, never fear! Do you know when they next will visit you?"

"I've no means of knowing," replied Wildman. Kennedy was here last night."

"Do you consider your life to be in immediate danger?"

"I can judge only from the heinous character of the outrage I already have suffered, and from what Kennedy said last night."

"They may attempt it this very night."

"Were they to visit me," rejoined Wildman, "I should expect nothing less."

"Beware, then, of accepting food or drink," said Keene, now preparing to leave him. "They may resort to poison."

"I'll take absolutely nothing," rejoined Wildman.

"Meantime I'll plan to get into your room and secrete myself," said Keene,

"Can you accomplish it?"

"I can give it a very strong argument," rejoined the detective, laughing softly. "Is the door of your room locked?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who has the key?"

"A powerful man whom I've heard called Toby."

"Ah, my custodian! Within a half-hour I'll put the boot on the other leg. Hark you, Mr. Wildman."

"Yes."

"If Kennedy and your rascal of a brother should presently come here, you must——"

"Hark!" exclaimed Wildman, suddenly interrupting him. "I think the wardroom door is being opened at this moment."

"The devil you say!"

"I am right!" exclaimed Wildman, excitedly. "I just heard it close."

Keene instantly rose to his knees on the stonework, and caught the line by which he had descended.

"Keep your nerve, Wildman," he cried, softly, speaking with more haste. "Should these scoundrels enter your room, protest that this glass was broken by a sudden gust of wind. Then stave them off by argument, or in some way, for a short quarter-hour. If

you find that to be impossible, yell for help, and I shall hear you through the broken window, and will again come down the line. I, at least, can reach you in that way. Leave all the rest to me."

"Go!" returned Wildman, hurriedly. "They are now outside my door."

"Get back to bed," hissed Keene.

Without waiting to see if his command was obeyed, for he too had caught sight of a streak of light under Wildman's door, Detective Keene sprang upon the stonework, and drew himself hand over hand up the line to the level of his own window.

In a moment he grasped the nearer of the two bars, and having quickly gained the sill, he instantly hauled up the dangling line out of possible observation.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOBY MEETS WITH A SURPRISE.

Now sure of Wildman's location, and fully informed of the crime which had been committed, Sheridan Keene no longer deferred decisive action.

He was aware that he could have remained upon the sill outside of Wildman's window, and in all probability have intimidated Kennedy and forced him to throw up his hands; yet the position would have been exceedingly perilous, and might have invited serious opposition from a man as desperate as Kennedy would surely become on learning that his own exposure and arrest were imminent.

Keene believed he now could accomplish his object in a less hazardous way.

Leaving the line upon the sill, ready for immediate use in case of a cry from Wildman, the detective forced his way between the bars of his window and alighted safely on the floor.

Having hurriedly put on his shoes, he next emptied the chambers of one of his revolvers, and with the butt of the weapon began a vigorous attack upon the panel of his door. Though the latter could not easily have been demolished, the blows delivered by the detective fell fast and furious, and resounded through the wardroom with a noise which presently resulted in precisely what Keene had anticipated.

"I reckon I can force another visit from Toby, if nothing more!" was the thought in Keene's mind as he hammered away with all his strength.

"And I'll give him a lively greeting!"

The last had barely crossed his mind when he heard the heavy tread of the attendant, who evidently was approaching through the wardroom at the top of his speed.

The next moment Keene heard the key thrust into the lock.

He sprang back sufficiently to allow the door to open, and thrusting the empty weapon into his pocket, quickly drew the other.

Then the door flew open with a crash, and Toby, fearless, furious, and with a heavy bludgeon in his hand, rushed into the room.

Keene thrust out his foot and gave him a shove, tripping him like a flash, and sending him headlong into the farthest corner.

The light from the wardroom now illumined the smaller chamber, and Keene stepped just over the threshold and observed that the ward was vacant, and its numerous doors closed.

Though dazed for an instant by his fall, Toby came quickly to his feet. Venting a snarl like that of an angry wolf, he turned sharp about and for a moment seemed about to launch himself upon the motionless figure standing in the open doorway.

Then he caught sight of the man's extended arm, and the glow of the light fell upon the weapon covering him with a threat more forcible and ominous than words could possibly have conveyed.

"Stand still, Toby, and keep still, or I'll let your life out with a bullet!" commanded Keene, with terrible sternness.

"Good God!" gasped the ruffian, inexpressibly startled and dismayed. "What's this?"

"This is a little episode I am enacting on my own hook," returned Keene, with unabated severity. "Take heed that you don't try to spoil it, or there will be but one actor in the little drama, and I shall be the one. Advance two paces nearer the door, Toby, so that I can see you a little more plainly."

"Where did you get that gun?" cried Toby, as yet quite unable to grasp the situation, or take in precisely what the detective had said.

"Do what I command!" cried Keene,

sternly. "Advance two paces or I shall fire!"

"For God's sake, don't shoot!" cried Toby, still unable to believe he was not confronted by a madman. "I'll do what you bid."

"Proceed to do so, then. Now stand where you are."

"Look here, Mr. Moran——"

"Oh, my name is not Moran," Keene curtly interrupted. "I am neither a fool nor a madman."

"What, then?"

"I am one of the Boston inspectors of police, sir, and am here to prevent a very ugly bit of work in which your rascally employer is engaged?"

"A detective?" gasped Toby, with eyes now starting from his head.

"Nothing less, sir! And it will be well for you, Toby, since the infamous doings of Kennedy are already known to the police, if I find that you have only a secondary hand in it."

Like all cowards and ruffians, Toby was ready to grasp at once at any straw by which to save his own neck.

"On my word, sir," he cried, hurriedly, "I know nothing about it."

"Don't you know that Kennedy has a sane man confined in the room beneath mine?" Speak out, sir, for I already know the truth."

"I know that he has a man confined there."

"Do you know who now is with him?"

"Say, sir, just lower that gun a little, will you?"

"No, sir!" cried Keene, sternly. "I am not in the habit of taking chances with such fellows as you are. Answer my question at once, or you will presently find yourself in jail along with two or three others here."

The threat had a salutary effect, and Mr. Toby impulsively threw down his bludgeon and gave up the ghost.

"I will answer you, sir!" he cried, hurriedly, with a gesture of appeal. "I give you my word I've had no hand in the affair, only under Kennedy's usual orders. I don't know who the man is, or why he is here."

"Well, I do, which is much better."

"Say only that you'll see me out of any scrape, sir, and I'll do anything you bid me."

"I will make no promise I may be unable to fulfill," Keene sternly rejoined. "You will

do what I bid you, in either case. If I find that you have had no criminal part in the affair, I, perhaps, will intercede for you."

"That's good enough, sir," cried Toby, eagerly. "I'm already sick of Kennedy."

"Is Kennedy in the room below?"

"I think he is, sir," the miscreant now readily admitted.

"Is he alone with the inmate of the room?"

"No, sir; there's another man with him."

"Do you know him by name?"

"I've heard him called McKenzie."

"The two scoundrels I wish to trap in the same nest," said Keene, bluntly. "Do you know their object in going there?"

"No, sir, I don't."

"Where were you when I began hammering upon the door?"

"I had just left the two men, and was coming up to this ward."

"What way shall I take to reach the ward below, and the room in which the man is confined?"

"Go through the door at the end of this ward, sir, and then down the stairs to the left. The door of the ward below is nearly at the foot of the stairs."

"Will I encounter any attendants on the way?"

"No, sir, not likely."

"Take out your keys, Toby, and give me those I shall require."

With an expression of sullen helplessness on his dark face, the ruffian fished out his ring of keys from his pocket, and detached a brass one of considerable size.

"That unlocks the door of both ward-rooms," he said, grimly.

"Toss it to me," commanded Keene.

The man obeyed, and Keene deftly caught it without lowering his weapon.

"Now give me the key to the room in which you are standing."

Toby had no alternative but that of complying, and Keene presently received the desired key as before.

"Now, Toby, fall back as far as the window," said the detective.

"What's that for?"

"Because I think it only wise to lock you here in my place," said Keene, with dry austerity. "Fall back, I say!"

With a resentful frown settling on his grim features, Toby retreated until his shoulder touched the wall behind him.

Then he caught sight of the open window, the line lying on the sill, and observed that one of the bars had been removed. As the truth broke upon him, an irrepressible exclamation of amazement rose from his lips; and turning sharp about he cried:

"I say, sir! I believe all you've told me. I'll do whatever you bid. Only I'd like you to see me out of it, sir."

"If you do what I bid," said Keene, shortly, "you will remain quiet here until I return to release you."

"I'll do that, sir," cried Toby, eagerly.

"See, then, that you do."

Keene already had thrust the key into the lock, and, immediately closing the door, he effectually secured it.

"Now, then, Kennedy," he said to himself, as he hastened through the long wardroom, "I will take a hand in your own little game!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE GELATINE CAPSULE.

Just before nine o'clock that same evening, Dr. Felix Kennedy and Tracy Maxwell were seated in the former's private office, confronting one another precisely as they had been seated in the same room one evening nearly a week previous.

The expression on the physician's face was even more cold and hard and crafty than it then had been, and the countenance of Maxwell was more pale, and the light in his frowning eyes less bold and more fearful.

A slight—or so, at least, Dr. Kennedy termed it—a slight disagreement had arisen between these two scheming desperados, and one which proved not easy to adjust.

"I think," Kennedy argued, in a conclusive sort of way, that seemed to offer his hearer no alternative, "I think, Mr. Maxwell, that if I now agree to safely dispose of the corpse, after your half-brother has become a corpse, that you, at least, should apply the remedy necessary to our situation. It will be better for all of us, you see, if you were to do it. Your half-brother will die by your hand rather than mine, which I am sure would be

preferable to him, I being a total stranger; and, furthermore, I then shall have a much more reliable hold upon you and your promised remuneration."

"You are very frank about it, to say the least," cried Maxwell, bitterly.

"I believe in perfect frankness in such transactions, Mr. Maxwell."

"But I did not agree to kill the man!"

"That is true, sir."

"You were to look after that."

"Pardon me, sir!" said Kennedy, coldly.

"I said only that at the end of a month you should have no half-brother. I did not state by whose hand he should be removed."

"You equivocate!" cried Maxwell, hotly.

"I would not have entered into the affair under any such condition as that which you now seek to impose."

"But having done so, sir, it certainly is now too late to withdraw," said Dr. Kennedy, curtly. "As a matter of fact, plainly stated, Mr. Maxwell, there is but one alternative. Either you will do this and end the thing, or I shall set the man at liberty. I most assuredly shall not continue to keep him here, for he is a very inconvenient piece of furniture, and not entirely safe to retain. I'll leave the matter entirely to you. If unable to do so with you, sir, I easily can adjust things in a satisfactory way with him; and you must terminate this affair to-night, or to-morrow he goes free."

"You are an infamous scoundrel, Kennedy!" cried Maxwell, who had become white even to his lips.

"There is a pair of us, then," said Kennedy, coldly.

"How can the deed be done?"

"I will provide you with the means, Mr. Maxwell. Surely that should be appreciated, if not an incentive, even."

"What means?" demanded Maxwell, driven to the wall by the desperate situation in which he found himself. "What means will you provide?"

Dr. Kennedy slowly arose, and with a sort of icy deliberation opened a cabinet on the wall.

"Will you have some brandy?" he incidentally asked, observing the bottle.

"Yes!" cried Maxwell, starting to his feet.

He took the proffered bottle, and, without waiting for a glass, swallowed a deep draught of the fiery fluid. It was barely possible that, without the stimulant, some better part of the man would have turned him from the awful crime contemplated. As it was, only the worst and most desperate part was further spurred to action.

When he set down the bottle, Dr. Kennedy stood confronting him with a small vial in one hand, and a tiny object between the thumb and forefinger of the other.

"This, Mr. Maxwell," he said, coldly, "is a small gelatine capsule. It contains a twenty per cent. solution of cyanide of potassium. It is sufficient to kill a man instantly. If you were to pass this between the lips of your half-brother, and break the gelatine, he would be dead almost before you could lift your hand from his face."

Maxwell now was ghastly white and trembling from head to foot, but his eyes were burning like globes of fire.

"Horrible! horrible!" he gasped, faintly.

"But very effective!" smiled Dr. Kennedy, tenderly caressing the capsule. "And could anything be easier?"

"And after it is done?"

"You may leave all the rest to me! You may be very sure, Mr. Maxwell, that I shall cover the crime beyond the possibility of exposure."

Maxwell ground his teeth for a moment, fiercely clenching his hands, and then cried vehemently:

"Let it be done at once, then!"

Dr. Kennedy deliberately replaced the brandy bottle and vial in the cabinet, and led the way out of his office and toward the reception-room.

He turned only once, and then said simply:

"If you now turn chicken-hearted, you will have lost your last opportunity."

"I shall not turn back, you knave!"

Kennedy touched the button on the wall of the reception-room. It was answered by a man in livery.

"Go tell Toby I want him," said the physician, never once speaking out of an ordinary tone.

The two men waited in silence.

At the end of five minutes Toby appeared.

"My friend wishes to visit the patient in ward B," said Dr. Kennedy. "Conduct us there at once!"

At the door of the wardroom, after it had been opened by the attendant and the lights switched on, the physician again addressed him:

"Give me the key to his door, Toby," he said.

"This is the one, sir."

"That is all, Toby. You may return to the ward above."

And the grim attendant went up to meet the experience already depicted.

Dr. Kennedy led his companion through the long wardroom, and approached the door of Wildman's chamber.

Before he could insert the key, however, Maxwell caught him by the arm, crying hoarsely:

"Wait! Wait! Let me steady my nerves!"

"Faugh! Nerves are strings!"

Yet the physician waited.

"What's that noise overhead?" gasped Maxwell, shivering from head to foot.

Kennedy listened for half a minute, then the sounds died away.

"Some infernal fool who hasn't command of his feelings!" he said, with icy grimness.

Five minutes passed, and Maxwell still stood shivering.

"Are you ready?"

"One minute more!"

It was the minute that saved John Wildman's life.

"Faugh! Am I to stand here until doomsday? If you are not going to do it, we'll return to the——"

"Open the door! Open the door! I am ready!"

The physician thrust the key into the lock and threw the door open.

A gust of wind through the broken window swept his face.

"How came that window broken?" he involuntarily cried, striding into the room to examine the break.

"It was done by a gust of wind," cried Wildman, from his bed. "It was broken only short——"

Then the words he would have spoken were cut short by a hand around his neck,

and the powerful figure of one of his own flesh and blood was crushing him down.

He wrenched himself free by a violent effort, instantly suspecting the fate intended for him, and a single desperate cry rose from his lips:

"Help!"

It was echoed by the sound of a blow that sent Tracy Maxwell to the floor, and followed by a command which rang like thunder through the chamber and wardroom.

"Stop in the name of the law! A move by either of you two men will invite instant death. In the name of the Commonwealth, I arrest you both!"

Kennedy wheeled sharp about, and like one of his own madmen sprang furiously toward the figure in the doorway.

Keene fired on the instant, and the report of his weapon rang with fearful intensity from the inclosed walls.

The physician threw both hands into the air, recoiled a little, then plunged face forward to the floor, shot through the breast.

The form of Tracy Maxwell had moved but once since Sheridan Keene dealt him the blow that stretched him upon the floor. Then he had risen hurriedly to his elbow; had heard the words thundered forth by the detective; had seen him standing motionless with weapon drawn in the doorway; and then the man's hand had gone to his own lips.

The light from the wardroom fell upon his face, and Keene impulsively bent above him.

"Good heavens, Wildman!" he cried. "This man is dead!"

It was true.

The capsule intended for another's death had been devoted to his own.

Two hours later Mary Randall, sitting in the library of her home in Newburg street, was startled by the violent ringing of the door-bell. Her first thought was of Sheridan Keene. She started impulsively to the hall, and met instead—the man she loved.

At about the same time Dr. Kennedy lay writhing on a bed in the Massachusetts Hospital, with a physician probing his wound. Although this did not directly cause his death, it ultimately left him only a wreck of his former self; and he died in the State's

prison at the end of the third year of the sentence received for his crime.

Toby, against whom no specific charges could be found, was released from custody soon after his arrest by Sheridan Keene; and it subsequently was said that he had departed for parts unknown.

One month subsequent to the scenes depicted, Horace Maxwell embarked for England to claim his inheritance; and he did not leave America alone.

He and Mary Randall were quietly married in Trinity Church on the day the steamer cleared. There was but one invited guest at the ceremony, a man for whom they entertained a love scarce less than that for each other.

What need to add that this man was—Sheridan Keene.

THE END.

Next week's SHIELD WEEKLY (No. 16) will contain "A Paper Gold Mine; or, Sheridan Keene After Money Order Book 2,409."

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